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Homerton College,

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March 23rd. 1927.

NOTE ON THE P.N.E.U. LETTER.

With regard to the use of methods and syllabuses of the P.N.E.U. in schools and the preparation of students for such a possibility, I can only say that for my own part I should find it quite impossible to undertake such preparation. Surely the whole aim of the training of teachers is to develop in them the power to work out, on a sound basis of educational principles, their own methods, and to put them in the way of gaining a wider academic knowledge and range of reading so that they may make their own syllabuses from a fine background.

Only in this way can they keep that freshness and reality which is the very essence of good teaching. We must secure the teacher against the deadening effects of teaching always the same matter, and, still more important, we must secure to them the opportunity of expressing and developing their own individuality and thereby enriching the profession by original thought at a later stage in their experience. Good as the syllabuses may be they are hardly calculated to be of use to a trained teacher. For the untrained they are probably of great value and have doubtless already proved a boon to the teachers in the 'Home schoolroom' for which they were originally intended and even to a wider circle of teachers who have not had the opportunities now given to teachers in training.

As a matter of fact an exponent of the methods came to speak to the students in this college a short time ago. She had a free hand; nothing was said beforehand; there was not any conscious bias against the methods - not in the slightest degree.

As a result of the lecture, a very few pertinent questions were asked by the students. They were not satisfied with the answers and afterwards quite simply expressed their disapproval of the system and nothing more was said about it. I should expect that exactly the same thing would happen again.

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NOTE ON THE P.N.E.U. LETTER.

I have discussed the P.N.E.U. literature and methods with each set of students towards the end of their second year, and students who have visited or worked in schools using these methods have given their experience. The literature is stimulating and suggestive to the untrained teacher, and the method is calculated to secure at least a sufficient provision of reading matter in the schools and a certain standard of literary merit (though the appearance in recent syllabuses of so many specially written books seems to weaken the case here). But the 'philosophy' is confused and incomplete; full of non-sequiturs and false analogies. Psychological terms are used loosely, if not incorrectly, and there is much arguing in a circle (A detailed criticism of P.N.U.E. psychology would be laborious, but could be undertaken; its central defect is probably a misunderstanding of the nature of ideas). Further what is of value in the 'method' by no means follows logically from the 'philosophy'.

More serious however are the following objections:-

1. The prescribed means of expression (narration or reporting) is exclusively verbal. To point out that provision is made in other connections for other modes of expression, e.g. drawing, handicraft, and dramatisation, is to admit, what is the case, that the system is bolstered up at all points by, and depends largely for its efficacy upon features which are in no way distinctive of it. The provision of corporate activities, and of training in manual skill are cases in point.
2. The system when wholeheartedly applied gives no training in reflection, comparison or criticism. It makes no provision for discussion, and hence tends to develop, if not rote memory, at any rate a habit of uncritical and unreflecting reproduction of the matter read. The specimen written exercises given in the pamphlets, noticeably several of these based upon readings of Shakespeare, shew a superficial appreciation of the course of events, a tendency, for example to report faithfully entrances, exits and the shorter speeches, without any understanding of the casual connection of events or of the motives underlying actions.
3. The schools are twitted for economising in books. Would they under P.N.E.U. methods tend to economise in trained teachers? Is there more than an incidental connection between the large proportion of uncertified and supplementary teachers employed in Gloucestershire and the wholesale adoption of P.N.E.U. methods in that county?

H. P.